



LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG

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THE following account of the most remarkable piece of oratory that America has yet produced is the result of earnest and repeated editorial solicitation. It is well known that to some others in the audience the first effect of Mr. Lincoln's address was a feeling of surprise and disappointment at its brevity, appreciation of its remarkable qualities attending subsequent perusal. It is most interesting to know that the young and already prominent lawyer, who was afterward to have so distinguished a career as cabinet officer, ambassador, and citizen, at once seized the significance of the address, and told Lincoln, on the spot, of his enthusiastic and prophetic admiration.—THE EDITOR.

THE political campaign of 1863 in Pennsylvania involving the reëlection of Governor Curtin was of very great interest and importance to the National administration as well as to the whole country. The year before, by the election of Governor Seymour, New York had arrayed herself substantially against the vigorous prosecution of the war; and Mr. Lincoln, as well as the members of his Cabinet and other leading Republicans throughout the country, thought it would be a very great disaster if Pennsylvania, in 1863, followed the example set by the Empire State in 1862, and also arrayed herself against the course the Government was pursuing for the suppression of the rebellion.

As I happened to be charged with the conduct of the canvass as Chairman of the Republican State Committee of Pennsylvania, I was necessarily thrown into close and constant intercourse with Mr. Lincoln and several members of his Cabinet, especially Secretary Chase and Secretary Stanton, and was in frequent consultation with them in Washington.

One of the consequences of this intimacy with Mr. Lincoln was that he acquired the habit of talking to me with great freedom about the different problems with which he was confronted, and

on more than one occasion even did me the honor to ask my advice on matters not relating to Pennsylvania. In this respect he was followed by Secretary Chase and Secretary Stanton. I have always thought that their regard for and confidence in me was probably increased by the fact that when some prominent politicians of Pennsylvania had strongly insisted that the reëlection of Governor Curtin could be rendered more secure if, in making large contracts for army supplies, a margin for exceptional profits was allowed, which profits could be utilized in the approaching election, of course I had very promptly and very emphatically disapproved of this suggestion.

It happened that I was in Washington in consultation with Mr. Lincoln and Secretary Stanton a few days before the dedication ceremonies were to take place at Gettysburg, and, as I was leaving, Mr. Lincoln kindly asked me to come back at the appointed time and go with him as his guest on his special train. I told him that General Couch, on whose staff I had been serving during the summer, had kindly offered to take me with him as his aide; but Mr. Lincoln said he wished to talk with me about some matters, and could do it more conveniently on the way to Gettysburg and back than at any other time.



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Of course I at once accepted his invitation with great pleasure.

As I was then in the very active practice of my profession, I did most of my traveling at night, and I told Secretary Stanton, who then expected to go with us, that I would come down on the night train, meeting the party at the station in the morning. He kindly asked me to go from the station to his house, take breakfast with him, and then we could go to the train together. I accordingly went to his house, but at breakfast he told me that an unexpected emergency had arisen in the War Department which would keep him in Washington, but that he had obtained the consent of the President to send his (Stanton's) son with us, and asked me to look after him on the journey. He proved to be a most agreeable and promising young gentleman, and afterward became a very prominent lawyer at the Washington bar; but he died prematurely, to the extreme regret of all his associates and, indeed, of everybody who was privileged to know him.

At the station, in company with Mr. Lincoln, I found Mr. Seward and several other members of the Cabinet, the French Minister, and one or two other diplomats, Mr. Nicolay, Mr. Hay, and, as I now remember, Mrs. Wise, the daughter of Mr. Everett, who was going to meet her father, who had then been several days in Gettysburg and was to deliver the oration on the occasion.

At Baltimore a baggage-car in which had been provided luncheon was attached to the train, and thither we were invited just as we were leaving Baltimore. As the train had entered a deep cut on the line of the railway, the baggage-car was even darker than usual, and, of course, the noise of the train was greater. Mr. Lincoln, at the head of the table, at once said that the situation reminded him of a friend of his in southern Illinois who, riding over a corduroy road where the logs were not sufficiently close together, was frightened by a thunder-storm. In the glimpses of light afforded by the lightning, his horse would endeavor to reach another log, but too frequently missed it, and fell with his rider. As a result of several such mishaps, the traveler, although not accustomed to prayer, thought that the time had come to address his Maker, and said: "Oh, Lord,

if it would suit you equally well, it would suit me much better if I had a little more light and a little less noise." As Mr. Lincoln concluded his story, the train passed into the open, where there was much more light and much less noise. Most stories are old, and this may have been heard before, but I had never heard it, nor have I heard it since.

Whenever the train stopped, Mr. Lincoln was required to address from the rear platform some words to the few people who had gathered to pay their respects to him, but I remember nothing of importance said by him on any of these occasions.

At Gettysburg, several of us, including Mr. Seward and Colonel Forney, who was then publishing a daily newspaper both in Washington and Philadelphia, were serenaded, and were asked to address the very considerable assemblage that had gathered in front of the hotel. As we had been traveling most of the day through Maryland, it was not surprising that Mr. Seward began his remarks by stating that it was the first time that he had been honored by the request to address his fellow-citizens of a slave State. His mistake was promptly corrected, in excellent humor, by the crowd, and he then gave a very terse and comprehensive statement of the only possible basis on which free government could endure, which was that the minority should loyally accept the result of an election and devote their energies only to appeals to the reason of the voters to transform their party into a majority when the test at the polls was renewed. Colonel Forney utilized the opportunity to explain that while he had supported Senator Douglas instead of Mr. Lincoln for the Presidency in 1860, his action had really been of greater assistance to the election of Mr. Lincoln than if he had supported him; for he had induced more than twice as many voters to withhold their votes from Mr. Breckenridge than he could possibly have induced to vote directly for Mr. Lincoln. When my turn came, I confined myself to some words of earnest praise of General Reynolds, who had been killed in the first day's battle, with his back to his birthplace at Lancaster, and his face, as always, to the foe. He had been very kind to me the year before, when he was in command at Chambersburg and I had

led a company of mounted men to assist in patrolling the Potomac, and I was glad of the occasion to bear my testimony to his admirable qualities.

Somewhat later there was a reception at the house of Mr. David Wills, where Mr. Lincoln was staying, and he greatly enjoyed my account of the speeches of Mr. Seward and Colonel Forney. Soon afterward he said to me that he was about to withdraw because he wished to consider further the few words he was expected to say the next day, and I recall nothing more until the next morning we arrived at the platform from which Mr. Everett was to speak. Mr. Hay, who was sitting by my side, said, after the prayer had been made, that he regarded it as the finest invocation ever addressed to an American audience, which was the first of many delightful and illuminating witticisms that I was privileged to hear from him in our long and friendly intercourse, which was terminated only by his death. The address of Mr. Everett seemed to me then, as it has whenever I have read it since, perfectly adapted to the occasion, and exactly what such an oration ought to be. It was of necessity elaborate and long, because it involved a complete justification of the war then in progress and a graphic and detailed description of the battle which had been so recently fought where we were standing; but it was eminently, scholarly, and eloquent; the classic product of a mind familiar with the masterpieces of all oratory, ancient and modern; and at its conclusion I think every intelligent person who heard it must have felt most favorably impressed with the manner in which the duty imposed upon Mr. Everett had been discharged.

At its close, as I remember, there was a short interval of music, and then Mr. Lincoln was presented, as only to accept, in a few formal words, the cemetery in behalf of the nation. As he came forward, he seemed to me, and I was sitting near to him, visibly to dominate the scene, and while over his plain and rugged countenance appeared to settle a great melancholy, it was somehow lightened as by a great hope. As he began to speak, I instinctively felt that the occasion was taking on a new grandeur, as of a great moment in history, and then there followed, in slow and very impressive and far-reach-

ing utterance, the words with which the whole world has long been familiar. As each word was spoken, it appeared to me so clearly fraught with a message not only for us of his day, but for the untold generations of men, that before he concluded I found myself possessed by a reverential awe for its complete justification of the great war he was conducting, as if conducted, as in truth it was, in the interest of mankind. Surely at that moment he justified the inspired portraiture of Lowell:

Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a
tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
The kindly earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first Amer-
ican.

And now comes the only inexplicable part of this statement. I waited until the distinguished guests who wished to do so had spoken to him, and then I said to him with great earnestness, "You have made an immortal address."

To which he quickly replied: "Oh, you must not say that. You must not be extravagant about it."

Others then came around him, and I did not see him again until on the train on our way home. He was suffering from a severe headache, and lying down in the drawing-room, with his forehead bathed in cold water. He had sent for me, as I knew, to renew our talk of the day before, but I could not restrain myself from saying to him: "You did not like what I said this morning about your address, and I have thought it carefully over, and I can only say that the words you spoke will live with the land's language."

He answered: "You are more extravagant than ever, and you are the only person who has such a misconception of what I said; but I did not send for you to talk about my address, but about more important matters."

I had told him on the way from Washington that I should be obliged to leave him at Hanover Junction on the return journey to keep a professional engagement of importance; and it was probably for

that reason that he sent for me so soon after leaving Gettysburg. We then discussed at some length the matter he wished to talk over, and I shortly afterward left the train and returned to Philadelphia.

I looked at the next day's newspapers with some eagerness, and was greatly surprised to find no such adequate recognition as I thought due to his address; and yet I could not persuade myself that I had really exaggerated its true character.

A few evenings afterward I was entertained at dinner at the Union League, and at the table were two very accomplished orators, Mr. Morton McMichael and Mr. Daniel Dougherty, whose charming gifts of speech old Philadelphians still remember. Mr. Dougherty asked me to tell about Mr. Lincoln at Gettysburg, and I then gave substantially the same account I have now written. I find it impossible to suppose that I am influenced in these recollections by the subsequent acclaim of the greatness of the address, for on many subsequent social occasions both Mr. McMichael and Mr. Dougherty asked

me to gratify the gentlemen present by repeating the impression that Mr. Lincoln's address had made upon me.

Perhaps I should feel more unwilling to tell the story which seems to place me almost alone in a category of appreciation of those immortal words, but I was supported by Mr. Everett; for when on the platform I offered him my most sincere and hearty congratulations on his noble oration, he said: "You are very kind, but Mr. Lincoln perhaps said more to the purpose in his brief speech than I in my long one."

That, however, was the only expression that I heard from anybody at the time to indicate that the address had made any profound impression; and I feel that I owe the readers of *THE CENTURY* the assurance that nothing but the continued entreaty of my good friend, its editor in chief, could have induced me to relate occurrences which seem to redound to my credit and to that of Mr. Everett, as being comparatively alone in anticipating in this matter the consenting verdict of history.

